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Body solfege in the BAPNE method – Measures and divisions

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Abstract

Western music education is principally developed around the study of solfege. Most of the approaches in this field of education are characterized by rationality and staticity. The aim of this article is to present an educational proposal for the study of solfege through body percussion and use measures and divisions according to the BAPNE method. Use of the body in its entirety can contribute to the definition of a new approach to solfege. Through psychomotor coordination and dissociation, use of laterality, of imagined, spoken, recited and singing voice, the executive function, attention, concentration and short and long term memory are stimulated and enhanced. Body solfege, intended as the practice of using body and movement in the comprehension and reading of basic rhythmic musical language, can be a valid instrument in integration of traditional solfege.

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1. Introduction

The study of solfege is of fundamental importance to any individual who wishes to follow the path of the art of music in the western world as an amateur or as a professional. Solfege is the rhythmic and melodic method of reading music.

Since the beginning of the XI Century, due to the absence of musical writing, musical education compelled students to memorize the whole musical repertoire (Scoppola, 2014). In monasteries, principal centres of education in the

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Middle Ages, music, and first sight-reading in particular, was taught. The benedictine monk Guido D'Arezzo in XI Century devised a method, based on the use of the hand in connection with singing, which made this practice more fluid. The guidonian method was based on solmization, that is the symbolic representation of the sounds produced phonically through syllabic elements taken from the gregorian hymn to S. John and written by Paolo Diacono. The symbolic representation of these sounds gave origin to the name of the notes with a profound connection with Christian symbolism (Chailley & Viret, 1988).

In the Middle Ages the Church was the principal responsible entity, in social practice, of a widespread musical literacy. For example in 1598 in the protestant gymnasium in Strasbourg we find an educational project devised by Chr. Th. Walliser which saw 5 weekly hours of music, singing of chorales by ear, exercises of intonation of intervals, execution even at first sight of polyphonic compositions (Scoppola, 2014).

Between 1800 and 1900 a new concept of infancy radically alters the educational methodologies defining child-sized objects, environments and initiatives (Grout, 1960). Nonetheless, in modern Europe, the sharing of the pedagogical value of music was neither easy nor homogeneous.

During the centuries solfege gradually changed and today we find it at times more complicated than the effective use in musical education. To this purpose, different educational methodologies have been devised and published as a reaction (Dalcroze, Orff, Kodaly, Willems, Suzuki, BAPNE).

The study of solfege is carried out with different methods through the different methodologies. Depending on the educational approach we use, on Italian music teaching (Delfrati, 1997) absolute reading (solmization of real notes and/or alphabetical notation system) or relative (solmization with mobile do, connected to the tone to which it refers).

At this stage, the study of solfege in western schools usually involves static reading, with students sitting at their own desks for the entire learning period. The only movement which accompanies the reading is a hand gesture which moves according to a fixed and unnatural structure.

Based on our experience as Italian teachers in the academic musical field, we notice a consistent school dropouts caused by the low interest which students show towards this practice and by the loss of the pleasure in studying music. After an enthusiastic approach to the musical language the student who is submitted to the traditional practice of solfege reports in most cases a drop in motivation and a feeling of frustration connected to learning.

The lack of internalization and the memorizing difficulty are two of the aspects which stem from this approach to the study of solfege.

Scientific literature is very limited on this subject and there are no specific articles on the teaching methodologies of solfege. Teaching practice and how to carry out examinations are transmitted orally year after year.

A proposal for the study of solfege connected to the movement of the body could offer a new opportunity for the students of music class inside schools (Carretero-Martinez, Romero-Naranjo, Pons-Terres, Crespo-Colomino, 2014) and academic institutes with a more dynamic approach to teaching (Vicente-Nicolás & Alonso-Sanz, 2013). Body percussion is a practice which is present in many educational fields and a deep knowledge of its characteristics (Romero, 2013) is fundamental for the outlining of activities in connection to learning music (Trives-Martinez & Vicente-Nicolás, 2013).

This article aims at presenting a teaching proposal on the study of solfege through the use of the body according to the principles and modalities of the BAPNE method (Romero, 2011).

2. Methods

BAPNE is the acronym of five disciplines joined together to form a unified vision in the educational approach. They are bio-mechanics, anatomy, psychology, neuroscience and ethnomusicology. In the BAPNE method body percussion, which has to be considered in this case as a musical expression (Romero, 2013), is used as an instrument of cognitive, social-emotional, psychomotor and neuro-rehabilitating stimulation. The body is stimulated while learning through the movement in space and there is a connection with the theory of multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1983).

From a musical point of view, learning the rhythmic patterns and sequences takes place through different forms such as imitation, inverse and contrary reaction, variable circular coordination and real-time signaling (Romero, 2011).

The theoretical basis of learning in the BAPNE method is primarily linked to the VAK model.

There is constant reference in the activities to the different types of attention (Posner, 1980; Sohlberg & Mateer, 1987, 1989). Attention is particularly developed in connection with the double task (Pons-Terres, A. A. Romero-Naranjo, F. J. Romero-Naranjo, Crespo-Colomino, Liendo-Cárdenas, 2014).

The activities of the BAPNE method are currently devised for students from 2 years of age to adulthood and differ depending on the psychomotor development of the recipients.

Activities are carried out under the supervision and stimulation of a certified trainer who acts through different work layouts such as the circle, the concentric circle, the double file, the couple and in very few cases lecture-like teaching. Because of the fact that in the BAPNE method there is reference to bio-mechanics, the three bio-mechanic planes and axes are used and combined together, particularly in connection with the longitudinal plane for the development of laterality (Romero, 2012). The use of the body in the learning of solfege thus presents an interesting dynamic opportunity for the involvement of the person and his education (Alonso-Sanz & Romero Naranjo, 2014). Nonetheless, in order to complete the available activities, it is necessary to make use of adequate spaces and some specific aids.

3. Results: presentation of activity

After reading the publications *Play rhythms with your body* (Romero, 2012) and *BAPNE for Teachers* (Romero, 2015) which contain specific body-solfege activities, in this first article we present some new activities which may represent an alternative or a support to traditional rhythmic solfege.

The first step in the identification of the teaching method linked to the use of the body consists in proposing an alternative way to perceive and carry out the scansion of the measure in its movements and in the binary or ternary subdivision of the movements themselves. To do this in the BAPNE method we make use of the lower limbs connected to geometric figures.

Imagining a geometric figure in front of him, the student can shift his weight each time alternatively directing his feet at the angles of the figure and thus making a precise choreography linked to the passing of time and the typical accents of each musical meter. The BAPNE method also provides different geometric figures for the same meter with different characteristics.

The peculiarity of this way to carry out measures with the lower limbs also lies in the consequent freedom of use of the upper limbs. Jointly, with the upper limbs, a binary or ternary division of the tempo is carried out, generating different combinations to form the following measures: 3/4, 4/4, 5/4, 9/8, 12/8, 15/8. The 3/8 and 5/8 measures are also presented, to be done sitting down.

These measures have the objective of supplying a concrete and dynamic motor experience of the scansion of time in the different accents which may support the student in the reading of a rhythm on the board or screen with video projection. From a musical point of view there are some specific activities for the learning of the duration values of musical notation which will be presented in a subsequent article and which allow for a connection between traditional reading and proper body solfege.

4. Discussion and conclusion

The use of the body in its entirety has been the object of study in many music teaching methods beginning with the first part of the 1900s in the past century yet discoveries. Especially in the field of neuroscience, the use of the body offers many cues for in-depth development in this field of knowledge. From a scientific and musical point of view very little has been published yet and we believe it to be important to define lines of comparison and development of new methodologies and approaches to music also in connection with research projects. We also believe that body solfege cannot replace traditional solfege in all its declinations because it branches out in many activities some of which are difficult to carry out with the body, because specifically theoretic in nature or because, for example, belonging to the realm of harmony which is prevalently mental and abstract.

Yet we may refer, as a result of our professional experience as music teachers, that the learning of measures with the body results in being more dynamic and appreciated by students in addition to defining more deeply and concretely

the sense of time connected to movement. Also, the use of harmoniously developed laterality constitutes an interesting qualifying element in music learning also connected to instrument practice. The development of different types of attention and the executive functions is, in the BAPNE method, the center of utmost interest and the link of these aspects has a strong connection with musical language and its learning.

As a conclusion an approach to music through the body is possible and desirable and there are many different aspects and modes to develop in the future, which may be object of study and research, especially from a neuroscientific and psychological-musical point of view. The activities presented in this article represent a first step in this direction: an integration of body solfège with traditional solfège can contribute towards a livelier lesson, facilitating the internalization of learnt theoretical elements from the cognitive aspect. It is nonetheless necessary to think about adequate structures, spaces and equipment for this type of educational approach which aligns itself with the school of thought which finds in the movement of the body an important and essential element of learning.

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